



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
January 26, 2009
5:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

V. Spencer, S. Fuhs, D. Sterner, M. Baez, S. Marmarou, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Waltman

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

L. Kelleher, S. Katzenmoyer, C. Younger, C. Kanezo, R. Hottenstein

Mr. Spencer, President of Council, called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.

I. Blue Ribbon Panel

Mr. Spencer stated his belief that the three City unions should have representation on the panel. He questioned Council's opinion on bringing the members in before the issues are known or bringing in members with expertise on certain issues. He also stated that Mr. Hottenstein recommends the panel have nine members and Ms. Kelleher recommends the panel have thirteen members.

Mr. Waltman stated that he would be agreeable with nine members. He noted that these nine members may recruit satellite members to assist when necessary. He stated his belief that the members should be given several issues to begin work and be able to go above and beyond that as they see fit. He questioned who the panel would report to and noted the need for Council involvement.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that the function of the panel should be known before members are named. This way the best people can be involved and know their commitment. She also noted that the members must understand the City's issues with poverty and how that impacts the City.

Mr. Marmarou stated his belief that Council should name members who are City residents as they will best understand the problems of the City. Mr. Waltman noted

the exemplary work of Paul Roedel (a County resident) for the Reading School District.

Mr. Sterner noted that the problems listed by Council members have been known. The problem is getting answers. He questioned if the panel will get to those answers. Mr. Waltman stated that road blocks are found and are not resolved. The panel will direct that resolution when road blocks occur.

Mr. Spencer questioned what the panel was being empowered to do. Mr. Waltman stated that they would be advisory and develop strategy to improve the City's financial situation. Finding solutions are not difficult; directing the solution is.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that the panel should advise the City on policy and advocate at the State level. Mr. Waltman stated that they should also work on immediate needs.

Mr. Marmarou noted his agreement that there should be union representation. He noted that the list of issues compiled by Council is too large and needs to be prioritized. He noted that pension funding will be one of the largest problems.

Mr. Spencer questioned if Council should choose the initial focus or if the panel should choose the focus. Ms. Baez stated her belief that Council should choose the initial focus and allow the panel to expand as they see fit. Mr. Waltman agreed with Ms. Baez and stated Council should choose three areas. He noted his belief that there are issues throughout the City.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to network with other cities for policy changes at the State level. Mr. Hottenstein stated that the Administration is working with other third class cities along the anti-gang corridor. He stated his belief that the current model for funding is broken and that this should be a focus of the panel.

Mr. Marmarou reminded all that when the Reading School District approached the State they could negotiate directly with the Department of Education for additional funding. This would not be the case for the City as the State is mandated to fund education.

Mr. Spencer noted the need to advocate for the City at the State level. He suggested members of the panel have access to State officials. Mr. Waltman noted his involvement in the FIT committee in 1998. He noted the panel's work on many levels and the involvement by many individuals.

Mr. Spencer stated that the State issues are long-term. Mr. Hottenstein noted the need for short-term results and for the panel to begin working and make recommendations quickly. He noted the need for their recommendations to prepare the 2010 budget.

Mr. Spencer called Council's attention to the list of issues that were identified. He suggested naming the top three priorities and allowing the panel to expand as necessary.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this will assist with panel members knowing their time commitment and length of service.

Mr. Fuhs noted that he is not opposed to the panel but is not totally behind the idea. He stated his belief that all third class Mayors should be working with the State.

Mr. Hottenstein noted his hope that the panel would begin meeting in February. He noted the Administration is working with York, Lancaster, Easton, and Bethlehem. He noted that they will be adding more cities as the group continues its work.

Mr. Fuhs stated that this form of government has not matured. He noted the work of non-City officials on the Corridor, River Place, and other initiatives. He stated that if these individuals leave the area the initiatives may not continue. He stated that the City needs to begin driving these issues.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her belief that Council needs to address so many issues that they cannot focus on policy-making.

Mr. Waltman noted his belief that many items on the issue list can be addressed without State involvement. He suggested the panel focus on these issues first.

Mayor McMahon joined the meeting at this time.

Council chose the following issues for the panel to begin discussions:

- Core services
- Regionalization
- Revenues and collection

Mr. Spencer noted that while the panel is studying these issues the Administration must stay focused on the State issues. He questioned the number of members of the panel.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for diversity on the panel. She stated that there is no diversity of those suggested to be panel members.

Council decided to have a nine member panel.

Mr. Spencer stated his belief that John Kramer from the Center for Community Leadership should also be involved in the State issues.

Mr. Hottenstein stated that the Administration has made their panel choices.

II. Executive Session

Council went into executive session at 6:12 pm to discuss personnel issues. Council exited executive session at 6:30 pm.

III. Agenda Review

Council reviewed this evening's agenda.

Mr. Spencer questioned if the money for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program has been designated. Mr. Hottenstein noted that this is highlighted in the activity list.

Marty Mayes and Dan Wright joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Mayes noted that the entire City qualifies for this grant according to federal HUD standards but CD will focus in the target areas. The application deadline is February 6. The City is requesting \$5 million and will work with Our City Reading, Habitat for Humanity, Neighborhood Housing Services, and the Blighted Property Review Committee. Foreclosed properties will be targeted for rehabilitation and will be sold to home-buyers.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this grant would be available again. Mr. Mayes stated that it would depend on additional money. He stated that the grant will be competitive but he is confident that Reading will be awarded this grant.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if this grant is all or nothing. Mr. Mayes stated that it is not. HUD will award the amounts as they see fit.

Mr. Fuhs questioned who would be writing the grant. Mr. Mayes stated that he is working with Triad.

Mr. Waltman questioned the strategy of spending down the money once it is granted. Mr. Mayes stated that the process will be spelled out in the grant process.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the problem sidewalk vendors are not addressed by this amendment. These vendors will be handled through the Zoning office.

Mr. Spencer questioned the rationale of changing the hours of operation for vendors located outside the downtown area. He stated his belief that this is not a quality of life issue for neighboring residents.

Mr. Sterner stated that at the final meeting with the sidewalk vendors all parties were agreeable to this amendment.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

By: _____
Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk